

Deuteronomy 29:9-15

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Moses described the parties that were about to enter into this additional covenant between the Suzerain (Ruler) God and the Israelites. This covenant will establish them as His treasured possession, as He swore to Israel's ancestors.

In light of the LORD's consistent faithfulness to His people seen in [Deuteronomy 29:2-8](#), Moses urged Israel to *keep the words of this covenant to do them, that you may prosper in all that you do* (v. 9). Throughout the book of Deuteronomy, Moses emphasized the truth that God rewards those who live in complete submission to Him. Obedience to God brings blessings but disobedience brings curses ([Deuteronomy 28](#)).

As Moses continued to minister to Israel, he asked them to gather together for a ceremonial purpose, saying, *You stand today, all of you, before the Lord your God* (v. 10). And to ensure everyone was included in the gathering, Moses listed the various participants, from the greatest to the least: *your chiefs, your tribes, your elders and your officers, even all the men of Israel, your little ones*. The participants included the men's wives, *and the alien who is within your camps* (v. 11). Everyone was included, from young to old, male and female, citizens and alien.

Moses divided his list into two groups. The first included *your chiefs, your tribes, your elders and your officers*, people who held positions of leadership in Israel.

- The *chiefs* refer to the tribal leaders.
- The *elders*, held in high esteem, were often regarded as authorities in their towns ([Deuteronomy 1:13](#)).
- The *officers* were probably the subordinate officials who served as scribes or secretary to assist the judges and other high rank leaders ([Numbers 11:16](#)).

The second group refers to other people living in the same society. It includes members of family units as well as non-Israelites living in Israel.

- *Even all the men of Israel.* This refers to other Israelite men who were not in leadership positions.
- *Your little ones, wives* (v. 11). These are the family members of the *men of Israel*.
- *The alien who is within your camps.* An alien (Heb. “gēr”) was a non-Israelite who lived in Israel and was primarily involved in providing labor, including *the one who chops the wood to the one who draws the water*. Though not a native, they were expected to obey all of the laws of the land, including those concerning the rituals and worship of the LORD ([Deuteronomy 31:12](#); [Exodus 12:19, 12:48ff](#); [Leviticus 16:29, 17:8, 10, 12f](#)).

The reason that all Israelites and aliens gathered and were standing before God was to *enter into the covenant with the LORD your God, and into His oath which the LORD your God is making with you today* (v. 12). The Suzerain God desired to establish a covenant relationship with His vassals (Israel). The verb translated *enter into* here (Heb. “ābar”) can literally be translated “to pass through.” The verb is perhaps used here to suggest that there was a ritual in which the parties to the covenant cut an animal in two and then pledged to adhere to its terms by passing between the parts of the animal ([Genesis 15:9-10](#); [Jeremiah 34:18](#)). This is supported by the fact that the word translated *making* (Heb. “kārat”) has the primary meaning of “to cut.”

In addition, the covenant was also sealed by an *oath* (Heb. “āla”), a solemn promise between two parties. Later in this chapter, this Hebrew word is translated “curse” (see vv. 19-21). This *oath* would have the effect of certifying that the people of Israel accepted the terms of the covenant.

The ultimate purpose of God entering into a covenant relationship with Israel was so that *He may establish you today as His people and that He may be your God* (v. 13). Through these rituals, the Suzerain (Ruler) God confirmed Israel as His *own possession among all the peoples of the earth* ([Exodus 19:5](#)). This would happen *just as the LORD spoke to Israel* ([Exodus 19:4-6](#)) *and as He swore to their fathers, that is, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob* ([Genesis 12, 26, 35](#)).

The LORD also told the generation standing before Him that *not with you alone am I making this covenant and this oath* (v. 14). There were others to be included in this covenant promised long ago. In light of the consequences of disobeying God’s covenantal laws mentioned in chapter 28 and elsewhere, He identified the parties involved in the covenant.

The LORD elaborated by saying *but with those who stand here with us today in the presence of the LORD our God and with those who are not with us here today* (v. 15). The phrase *those who are not with us here today* has been understood in different ways. It seems most likely that it refers to all Israelites of future generations. If so, every Israelite of every future generation are part of this covenant and must live by its terms in order to be blessed by the Suzerain (Ruler) God.

The identification of the parties would serve as proof of God's fairness and justice when He inflicted judgment on those who broke their promise to obey the covenant. God's covenantal relationship was not just for the generation of Israel that was on the plain of Moab with Moses. Its benefits extended to all future generations because the Suzerain (Ruler) God chose the nation Israel, not just one single generation of Israelites.

Biblical Text:

⁹So keep the words of this covenant to do them, that you may prosper in all that you do. ¹⁰You stand today, all of you, before the Lord your God: your chiefs, your tribes, your elders and your officers, even all the men of Israel, ¹¹your little ones, your wives, and the alien who is within your camps, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water, ¹²that you may enter into the covenant with the Lord your God, and into His oath which the Lord your God is making with you today, ¹³in order that He may establish you today as His people and that He may be your God, just as He spoke to you and as He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ¹⁴“Now not with you alone am I making this covenant and this oath, ¹⁵but both with those who stand here with us today in the presence of the Lord our God and with those who are not with us here today.